



Upper Yellowstone and Beartooths Trip Notes July 22 – 31, 2016

Headlines

- Nephew Chad agreed to accompany me on this, his first hike. It is always good to have youth around. I've had the company of nephew Colin too.
- Chad is determined to not be a one-and-done hiker. He has his heart set on the Grand Canyon and Yosemite with Half Dome.
- Hot hot hot. Like 90°. Most every day the sun beat down. In Cooke City I begged the hotel (they were without air conditioning) and got a fan. It should be a mountainous region where the evenings are cool and thus air conditioning is not needed. Not.
- Beautiful rushing rivers everywhere with diamonds in the water. There were colorful river rafts and lots of fly-fishing.
- Post hike gave me trips to Big Sky via a drive along the river, two visits into Bozeman the university town, a drive and walk through historical Livingston, and another reunion with the little town of Ennis where I ran the toughest and highest road marathon in the Americas in 2011. That T-shirt is a constant fixture in my travel suitcase but no one in Ennis noticed it.
- Country music is readily available on their radio stations. New York City has lost their country station and I miss it.

Surprises

- The Ennis T-shirt is a constant fixture in my travel suitcase but no one in Ennis noticed it during my couple hours of wandering and shopping.
- Rental car rates in Bozeman must be the highest I have ever encountered. Over \$100 a day.
- We saw a lot of bikers. Both bicycles with panniers and motorcycles. Once we saw two bikers carrying two babies plus lots of panniers plus in the 90° heat. Is that child abuse? It is certainly crazy.
- The second of two hotels was a B&B and quite remote. To prove the remoteness and the lack of anything to do, there was calf roping lessons in the evening. Overlooked by a lovely and cool breeze deck.
- Montana has no sales tax.
- Montana allows casinos and they are seen quite often, are very small, and include a liquor store. My pre-hike hotel had one out front and it was frequented by the Harley type folks.

- Lots of zip lining. I understand the call of zip lining if it is across a canyon or some beautiful remote area that you can't hike. But there were plenty of times of zip lining over nothingness.
- Big Sky trip gave me a long beautiful drive along the river. Big Sky's terrain is said to be the largest ski area in the US. Big Sky's little town was disappointing in that it was so artificial. Big Sky has a lot of building going on so someone likes it.
- I came on this trip in part because I remembered the beautiful drive from Ennis to Bozeman. Proving that you can't go home again, it was not as beautiful as I remembered.

Daily trip notes home

From Bozeman

The first day of another adventure -- soon to start of the Upper Yellowstone and Beartooths hike.

Such a mixture of "good" and "off" is seen in this picture out my hotel window. (See pics).



Mysterious Majestic Mountains right behind a truck stop. My two night hotel stay is okay but remote with this truck stop on one side and an iffy small casino frequented by bikers on the other side.

I have wanted to return to Montana since my hike in the Beartooths. And since my "highest road marathon in the Americas" about an hour and a half away in Ennis Montana.

Also a mixture of "good" and "off" stuff is and was the air travel to get here. It could be some of the more expensive air miles in our country coming from Newark through Denver into Bozeman. Thus I didn't pay for first class but did use a regional upgrade certificate which didn't work for the long portion. I was next up on the upgrade list but didn't make it. It has been a long time since I have flown economy and I can empathize with the unhappiness of flyers on the full flights.

The real "off" was my nephew Chad's experience getting here. His flight out of St. Louis was delayed for maintenance and thus he missed his connection in Denver. The "good" was that united airlines did the right thing and put him up in a hotel and gave him double food coupons. The other "good" was that there was nothing convenient to do in this Bozeman area anyway. I didn't arrange for a rental car for one day since it was so pricey, and thinking there would be some guided tours available. Not. A taxi into Bozeman itself, due to no Uber and no taxi competition, is in the \$50 range one way.

So I walked a couple blocks to a little Mexican restaurant for dinner, past the iffy casino, past the truck stop, and was half glad that Chad was able to stay in Denver. My area was dead boring. He claims to have had a pleasant evening in an OK hotel and found an agreeable pub for the evening.

United Air put him on the next available flight which got him into the Bozeman hotel around 2 PM. I guess I wasn't too worried about the extra pounds/calories because Chad and I took off to the Mexican restaurant for my second dose of calorie laden food.

My favorite tour guides showed up around 4 PM and with the sweetest and most thoughtful of birthday gifts. Birthdays are not allowed any longer after age 70 and they know it so they are doubly challenged to come up with unique ideas. They did.

Later in the evening they took Chad into the town of Bozeman for a dinner. I travel with sandwiches and didn't want to waste them and did want to finish up a book.

P.S. We don't have trucks this big in NJ nor the tandems. (See pics above).

Monday from Cooke City

I'm in the Beartooths Pass area which is rather unknown but should be known as the Alpine Lakes region. Driving from Red Lodge out of Bozeman to Cooke city, which is a bitty little town just at the upper Yellowstone area, must be one of the more beautiful drives and more dramatic drives available in our country.

Here is a pic Tom found. It would take a helicopter I'd guess. But today, like a few years back, I hiked up to a series of alpine lakes.

We hiked through swamps, crossed multiple stream beds (thanks for the help from Steve and Chad), up to 9500' elevation, for about 6 hours, through awful black flies and mosquitos which ate me through the DEET, but yep, again it was worth it.

It was something like having babies in that you forget the pain and agony. I had forgotten that it took about three hours' worth of trudging up these hills and through bugs and across swamps to get there. A helicopter does make more sense.

To prove how special it is, after learning that Chad had not hiked prior to this trip, I asked him if he thought it was worth it. He was very affirmative and wondered how he had missed hiking for so many years. More than worth it, he said. I think he related it to his book reading: he is a serious reader now but said that he missed reading for a few years before picking it up. Just goes to prove that it's never too late.





I have given you a photo of Chad, and a scene with what looks like a big giant turtle. Some who got the picture thought it really was.

And now I am spending my evening watching the Democratic convention from old historical Cooke city Montana.

Tuesday was animal day

Yesterday was almost mosquito and black fly day and I have sores to prove it. Today it was Bison, elk, antelope, a badger, bald eagle, and surely more. We got greedy and started looking for a bear but all we found was bear scat.

Here is a pic of one of a few bison in the road. Right with us.

And an odd picnic spot on our hike where only ants were seen. Here is Chad and our Fearless Leaders.



After a fairly strenuous hike up a mountain, we were charmed with an overview of tomorrow's onerous looking mountain before joining the tourist crowds at Mammoth Hot Springs.

Do I feel older? I should. Smile. But it's not only age but Elevation sure makes it tough to breath; at least the feeling of a giant swelling of the head is gone. I live at sea level and we've had plenty of 6-9,000' elevation.

I gave up dinner out again for convention watching. Yes, I did the same for the republican convention.

Wednesday and Thursday.

We've sure seen a lot of animals. I forgot the mule deer that we see on the side of the road. Everyone was quite excited about the yellow with red bird called the Western tanager. And the Sage Grouse with babies and daddy fanning his tail. Up on top of Bunsen Mountain outside Mammoth we saw the usual little Pica with its pipsqueak sound that Nola can perfectly mimic.

Getting up onto Bunsen Peak was not a happy trail. Maybe I was the only one that complained because I was the one that had the toughest time getting up this rather steep and unexciting and poor footing trail. It was hot. There was no shade. But once up and into the Rolling hills. It might have been worth it. Maybe not.

Our last days hike through rolling hills, nice footing, and forests, past the beaver ponds, was a delight. I wish it could have gone on for a couple more hours.

See one of the views. Then the liter sized water glasses we all needed. That's Chad looking over a menu that even had foie gras. Honest.



One trout taco and one bison taco. I ate it all after our last hike.

And then it all comes to an end and we drive back to Bozeman where most spent the evening but I was to spend three nights.

As a proper way to end Chad's first real hike, I'm delighted to say that he has become a hiker and is looking forward to another one. He has chosen the Grand Canyon as his next endeavor but is looking seriously at Half Dome climb at Yosemite. Success!

Then Chad had double success. Due to a flight situation he was happily delayed getting home because they gave him a food voucher and a \$300 voucher for future travel. Grand Canyon here he comes.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday post hike out of Bozeman.

I drove up to Big Sky Resort and wandered. It's a huge area and said to have the most ski area of anywhere in the U.S. There were nice hotels to get into and out of the heat. Some chair lifts. A way to go up to the highest peak. Lots of shops. But mostly it was artificial and a disappointment for a plain Jane tourist not looking to zip line or ski.

Another day I enjoyed a ride to my old marathon starting location, Ennis, a cute little town that I enjoyed before and enjoyed again. I considered driving up to the marathon route until I remembered

how Annette and I had gotten frightfully lost coming back down and thought we'd have to spend the night out. GPS coverage didn't exist and there were not many farm houses there either.

A drive into some adjoining towns was more enjoyable than Big Sky Resort, as there were numerous historical train stations, rows of shops and lovely little houses.

I was probably ready to go home.

Itinerary

Fri Jul 22 - Diana

6:30am Depart Newark EWR via UA#1736
8:43am Arrive Denver DEN for plane change – 2 hour layover

11:30am Depart Denver DEN via UA#452
1:10pm Arrive Bozeman BZN – Call for hotel shuttle

Fri Jul 22 – Chad

4:40pm Depart St Louis STL via UA#4676 operating as United Express
6:08pm Arrive Denver DEN for plane change – short 57 minute connection

6:50pm Depart Denver DEN via UA#526
8:35pm Arrive Bozeman BZN – Call hotel for shuttle

Host Hotel La Quinta Belgrade at the airport – 2 nights with 2 rooms – booked by Diana
6445 Jackrabbit Lane, Belgrade, MT 59714 Tele 406 388 2222

Sat Jul 23

What to do? Ask about tours. Bozeman is 9 miles from airport or about \$40 taxi ride; La Quinta has airport shuttle but no shuttle to downtown; truck stop with food across the street; a Mexican restaurant within a walk; a casino with liquor store inside across the street

Sun Jul 24 – Day 1

8:00am Start of hike at La Quinta – come ready to hike and with suitcase

Description from www.ParksPlusHiking.com – While we are always amazed at the size and variety of Yellowstone National Park, we are also sometimes frustrated by our inability to include enough of that wonder in a single tour. With this new 5-day tour we are addressing that issue, focusing on the northern area of the park, specifically several trails near Mammoth Hot Springs. Flower-filled meadows, rugged peaks, pristine alpine lakes, abundant wildlife, and much more. And since we're in the area, we're adding two incredible hikes in the nearby Beartooth Mountains.

Sun Jul 24 - Day 1

Night Lake - Distance: 4 mi and Difficulty: 2

Our exploration of Yellowstone North and the Beartooths begins with an epic journey--by van in this case--over 10,947' Beartooth Pass, one of the most remote and scenic spots in the lower 48 states. From the pass, we'll continue west (and down) to our first day's trailhead for the hike to Night Lake. While today's hike is fairly tame in terms of length and difficulty, it will be a great warmup (and teaser) for a bigger adventure on Day 2.

Lodging: Alpine Inn – 1st of 2 nights
105 East Main Street, Cooke City, MT 59020
Tele: 406 838 2262 and 888 838 1190

Mon Jul 25 - Day 2

Beartooth High Lakes - Distance: 8 mi and Difficulty: 4

Back up toward Beartooth Pass, we've a date this day with the legendary Beartooth High Lakes. From the trailhead on the shore of Beartooth Lake, we'll first make our way across several seasonal

creeks, then ascend past 10,514' Beartooth Butte. From there we pass a string of scenic high alpine lakes, each one unique and memorable, as we loop back toward the trailhead.

Lodging: Alpine Inn – 2nd of 2 nights

Tue Jul 26 - Day 3

The Hoodoos and Snow Pass - Distance: 7 mi and Difficulty: 3

No, we haven't misplaced a Bryce Canyon trail, there really are hoodoos in Yellowstone and that's where we hike today. These somewhat jumbled granite rock formations form the backdrop to some great views back down to Mammoth Hot Springs area. Past the hoodoos, we'll traverse a lovely wildflower filled meadow, then make the relatively tame ascent to Snow Pass. Post-hike we're headed on to Gardiner, Montana and the luxurious Yellowstone Basin Inn, our home for the next two nights.

Lodging: Yellowstone Basin Inn – 1st of 2 nights
4 Maiden Basin Drive, Gardiner, MT 59030
Tele 406 848 7080 – no AT&T cell only Verizon

Wed Jul 27 - Day 4

Bunsen Peak/Mammoth Terraces - Distance: 8 mi and Difficulty: 5

Today it is time to climb a mountain, specifically rocky Bunsen Peak with its 360 degree views of the Mammoth area and the park's northern border. Along the way to and from the summit, we'll keep our eyes peeled for bighorn sheep that frequent the area. Once back to the van, we'll make our way down to Mammoth Hot Springs for a stroll on the trails and boardwalks amidst colorful Mammoth Terraces.

Lodging: Yellowstone Basin Inn – 2nd of 2 nights

Thu Jul 28 - Day 5

Beaver Ponds - Distance: 5 mi and Difficulty: 2

For our final hike of "Yellowstone North," we once again make our back to Mammoth Hot Springs. This time we head west from the village area on a gentle 5-mile loop past a series of marshy beaver ponds. Along the way we should have a good chance of spotting elk, moose, and bears (both black and grizzly "flavors"). Following the hike, we'll have one last lunch together in Gardiner, then head back to Bozeman to conclude the tour.

For Chad

Host Hotel La Quinta Belgrade/Airport Tele: 406 388 2222 – reserved by PPH

1 exit or 9 miles from downtown but about \$40 taxi ride to town and there's no Uber yet. Yes airport shuttle requiring booking but no shuttle to downtown

For Diana

5:00pm End of hike and dropped at airport
Rental Car Pick up Hertz rental car conf#G8163382095 until Saturday 7/30/16 at 6pm

Hotel La Quinta Belgrade/Airport (info above) – 3 nights

Fri Jul 29 – Chad

10:16am Depart Bozeman BZN via UA#4799 operating as United Express
11:54pm Arrive Denver DEN for plane change – short 53 minute connection

12:49pm Depart Denver DEN via UA#5934 operating as United Express
3:58pm Arrive St Louis STL

Fri and Sat Jul 29 and 30 - Diana

Visit Ennis MT and Sam – 1 ½ hour one way -- renew acquaintance with ‘highest road marathon in the Americas’; Drive Gallatin Canyon? Drive to Big Sky – 1 hour one way

Sun Jul 31 – Diana

12:11pm Depart Bozeman BZN via UA#1178
6:24pm Arrive Newark EWR